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Competiția de proiecte de cercetare a Academiei Oamenilor de Știință din România destinată tinerilor cercetători „AOSR-TEAMS-III” EDIȚIA 2024-2025 – „Transformarea digitală în științe”

Sesiune științifică AOSR tineri cercetători etapa 2 – decembrie 2024

Titlul proiectului: Narativa cognitivă și emoțională a inegalităților educaționale în rândul tinerilor români

Domeniul științific propus: Științe socio-umane

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Narativa cognitivă și emoțională a inegalităților educaționale în rândul tinerilor români

Domeniul științific: 10. Științe socio-umane

Context

Prezentul raport de activitate descrie activitatea și rezultatele pentru cea de-a doua etapă de raportare. Astfel, pot fi identificate trei componente: 1) A2.1 Transformarea cercetării participative prin velfies: O abordare multimodală în Photovoice, constând în elaborarea și transmiterea spre evaluare a unui manuscris care vizează metodologia participativă Photovoice; 2) A2.2 realizarea unei analize sistematice a literaturii de specialitate privind relația dintre expunerea la inegalități socio-educăționale și patternuri de învățare; 3) alte activități de diseminare a rezultatelor cercetării.

Activitatea 2.1 Transformarea cercetării participative prin velfies: O abordare multimodală în Photovoice

Cadrul teoretic

Photovoice, o metodologie de cercetare-acțiune participativă dezvoltată de Wang și Burris (1997), își propune să activeze grupurile marginalizate, oferindu-le contexte pentru a documenta experiențele de viață prin intermediul fotografiei (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Dunn et al., 2024; Harasym et al., 2024; Selke, 2016). Această metodă a fost aplicată în diverse domenii, inclusiv sănătatea publică, dezvoltarea comunitară și educația, pentru a permite participanților să documenteze și să comunice povești vizuale despre realitățile lor sociale și personale. În contexte educaționale, Photovoice a fost utilizată pentru a înțelege experiențele elevilor și pentru a le oferi o platformă de exprimare vizuală care să influențeze politicile și practicile educaționale (Ciolan & Manasia, 2017, 2024).

Deși Photovoice se individualizează prin faptul că oferă o voce celor care de obicei nu sunt auziți, există critici care subliniază faptul că metoda poate fi afectată de un control excesiv din partea cercetătorilor, reducând astfel autonomia participanților (Chen, 2023; Oliffe et al., 2023). Mai mult, modalitatea tradițională de utilizare a fotografiilor poate limita complexitatea și diversitatea formelor de exprimare a participanților, întrucât cercetătorii tind să acorde prioritate narațiunilor în detrimentul imaginilor, ceea ce poate diminua potențialul fotografiilor de a transmite sens și semnificație (Börner et al., 2024; Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020).

În contextul digital contemporan, tehnologiile video, precum velfies (înregistrări video realizate de participanți), oferă o oportunitate de a extinde metodologiile vizuale existente (Parsons et al., 2023; Rennie et al., 2022; Valdez & Gubrium, 2020). Velfies permit o tranziție de la rolul de observatori pasivi la cel de „performeri” activi, îmbogățind procesul de

cercetare cu elemente multimodale – video, narațiuni și performanțe – care reflectă autentic perspectivele participanților (Börner et al., 2024). Această transformare metodologică aduce în prim-plan dinamici noi de participare, angajament și co-producție în cercetare, oferind participanților relevanță și control asupra modului în care povestesc și își prezintă experiențele.

Lucrarea de față explorează această transformare digitală a metodologiei Photovoice.

Astfel, cercetarea propune utilizarea *velfies* ca instrument de expresie multi-modală în cercetarea participativă. Un *velfie* reprezintă un videoclip înregistrat de participanți, care integrează adesea elemente performative (Sterling-Fox et al., 2020). Transformarea multi-modală a Photovoice deschide o nouă direcție metodologică pentru cercetările educaționale, întrucât permite colectarea unor date mai bogate și mai nuanțate. Caracterul performativ al *velfie*-urilor, în contrast cu staticitatea fotografiilor, transformă participanții în naratori activi care creează realități sociale, nu doar le documentează.

Întrebările și obiectivele cercetării

Pandemia COVID-19 a avut un impact profund asupra educației, forțând instituțiile de învățământ să adopte rapid formate online sau hibride. Acest lucru a generat provocări nu doar pentru studenți, ci și pentru cercetători, care s-au orientat către noi modalități de a colecta date și de a încuraja implicarea activă a participanților (Ferlatte et al., 2022; Ng et al., 2024; Oliffe et al., 2023; Parsons et al., 2023). În cadrul acestei tranziții, tehnologiile digitale au deschis noi oportunități de expresie pentru participanți, inclusiv utilizarea *velfie*-urilor. *Velfies* permit studenților să își exprime gândurile și emoțiile într-o manieră mai dinamică și autentică, comparativ cu fotografiile tradiționale.

Întrebarea centrală a cercetării care ghidează acest studiu este: Cum pot metodologiile digitale, în special *velfies*, îmbunătăți abordarea Photovoice în cercetarea educațională?

Studiul își propune să exploreze dacă integrarea *velfies* în metodologia Photovoice permite o implicare mai profundă și mai nuanțată a participanților. În mod specific, investighează modul în care studenții utilizează *velfies* pentru a documenta și a reflecta asupra experiențelor lor de învățare.

Prin includerea unei dimensiuni multimodale în metodologia Photovoice, studiul urmărește să dezvolte un cadru metodologic nou care să îmbine instrumentele digitale performative cu cercetarea participativă. Scopul este de a demonstra că *velfies* pot aduce un nivel suplimentar de profunzime și autenticitate în cercetările educaționale, oferind în același timp participanților un spațiu mai larg de exprimare.

Astfel, acest studiu nu doar explorează potențialul tehnologiilor digitale în cercetare, ci și oferă o contribuție semnificativă la înțelegerea modului în care inovarea metodologică poate transforma relația cercetător-participant și poate îmbunătăți calitatea datelor colectate.

Metodologie

În primele faze ale proiectului, recrutarea participanților s-a realizat prin promovarea proiectului pe rețelele sociale ale universității și prin afișe virtuale. În total, 127 de studenți au manifestat inițial interes, dar doar 43 au participat activ. Aceștia au provenit dintr-o gamă largă de programe de studii, inclusiv inginerie, științe aplicate, mecatronică și management. Proiectul a atras, de asemenea, studenți din mai multe grupe de vârstă, asigurând o diversitate de perspective.

În cadrul sesiunilor de formare, studenților li s-au oferit atât informații tehnice, cât și etice. Aceste sesiuni au fost esențiale pentru a-i ajuta pe participanți să înțeleagă cum să realizeze fotografii și să creeze narațiuni care să reflecte autentic experiențele lor de învățare, ținând cont de confidențialitatea și dreptul la imagine. De asemenea, au fost încurajați să evite imagini cu persoane care nu și-au dat consimțământul explicit pentru a fi fotografiate. În plus, li s-a prezentat tehnica SHOWeD, un instrument utilizat frecvent în Photovoice pentru a structura discuțiile asupra imaginilor și a explora dimensiuni mai profunde ale narațiunilor vizuale.

Pe parcursul proiectului, s-a observat o tendință relevantă metodologic: unii studenți au început să opteze pentru velfies, considerând că acestea reflectă mai bine implicarea lor activă în experiențele educaționale. Velfie-urile au fost percepute ca o modalitate autentică de a surprinde dinamica proceselor educaționale, deoarece includeau elemente audio-vizuale și performative care lipseau din fotografiile tradiționale. Această schimbare a deschis noi căi de explorare metodologică, în care participanții nu doar documentau, ci și construiau experiențele lor, contribuind la crearea unei narațiuni mai bogate.

Pe parcursul celor trei semestre de colectare a datelor, participanții au avut ocazia să reflecteze asupra inovației pedagogice, folosind atât fotografii, cât și velfies. Platformele digitale precum Miro au fost utilizate pentru a construi o expoziție digitală de tip *graffiti wall*, unde participanții și-au împărtășit fotografiile și narațiunile, creând astfel un spațiu colaborativ de discuții și reflecții.

Analiza datelor a implicat atât sesiuni asincrone, cât și grupuri de discuții sincrone, unde participanții au fost ghidați să își selecteze propriile imagini pentru analiză în cadrul grupurilor. Acest proces a fost complementat de hărți tematice interactive, care au ajutat la

vizualizarea temelor emergente. Velfie-urile, în special, au fost analizate prin prisma *modalităților tehnologice, compoziționale și sociale* (Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020), subliniind modul în care participanții au utilizat aceste instrumente pentru a crea o narațiune mai expresivă și mai personalizată.

Rezultate obținute/așteptate

În cadrul proiectului, participanții au început să folosească velfies ca o modalitate expresivă de a surprinde și nara experiențele lor de învățare. Acest lucru a fost inițiat de observațiile unor participanți, care au sugerat că videoclipurile reflectă autentic implicarea lor, oferind un mediu dinamic în care să-și exprime emoțiile și reflecțiile asupra procesului de învățare. În urma acestei sugestii, velfies au devenit o parte integrantă a studiului, extinzând capacitatea metodologiei Photovoice de a documenta realitățile complexe ale învățării.

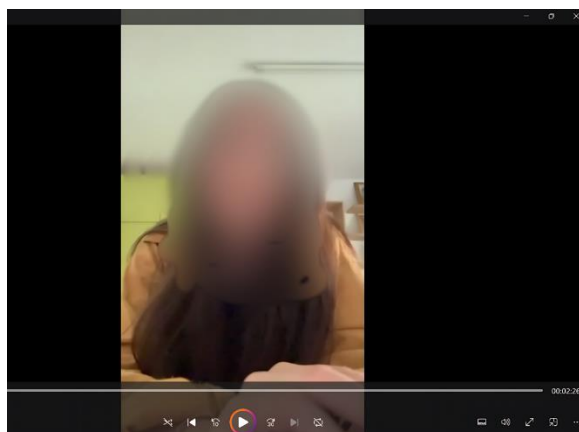
Tipologia velfies

Analiza velfies în baza *modalităților tehnologice, compoziționale și sociale* (Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020) a evidențiat două tipologii principale: *velfies reflective* și *velfies performative*.

Un velfie reflectiv redă reflecții personale ale participanților, prezentând gânduri și emoții individuale, fără a fi neapărat nevoie ca fața realizatorului să fie vizibilă. Scopul principal al acestor velfie-uri este de a transmite autenticitate, fără prea multă prelucrare sau producție scenică (**Figura 1**). De obicei, sunt filmate cu smartphone-uri și au un caracter brut, nealterat, reflectând o legătură emoțională profundă între participant și conținutul învățării. Prin astfel de velfie-uri, participanții își dezvăluie gândurile și sentimentele, adesea într-un mod intim și introspectiv, oferind o perspectivă autentică asupra experiențelor lor educaționale.

Figura 1

Captură de ecran dintr-un velfie reflectiv, în care protagonista discută despre lucrul în echipa și conexiunea emoțională cu colegii



Velfies performative implică o abordare mai compozițională, în care participanții sunt activ implicați în crearea unei narațiuni vizuale deliberate (e.g., **Figura 2**). Spre deosebire de velfie-urile reflective, cele performative includ adesea elemente precum text adăugat, montaj de scene sau interacțiuni cu camera, reflectând o intenție clară de a crea o poveste coerentă și cu impact. Aceste velfies sunt utilizate pentru a prezenta experiențe educaționale colective, accentuând dimensiunea socială și colaborativă a învățării. De exemplu, în unele cazuri, participanții au folosit velfie-uri pentru a documenta proiecte de cercetare socială în grup, subliniind importanța colaborării și a apartenenței la comunitate.

Figura 2

Captură de ecran dintr-un velfie performativ care documentează un proiect de cercetare socială ca experiență inovativă de învățare



Concluzii

Integrarea velfies în metodologia Photovoice marchează o schimbare semnificativă în cercetarea participativă, făcând tranziția de la simpla participare la accentul pe expresie și performativitate. Acest studiu arată că metodologiile digitale pot îmbogăți cercetarea educațională, oferind participanților o modalitate mai flexibilă și autentică de a-și împărtăși experiențele. Velfie-urile permit o documentare emoțională și imersivă a proceselor de învățare, reconfigurând dinamica tradițională de putere dintre cercetători și participanți. Participanții nu mai sunt simpli observatori, ci co-creatori activi ai narațiunilor educaționale, ceea ce redefinește relațiile din cercetare.

În plus, aceste instrumente digitale sprijină un cadru metodologic colaborativ, invitând participanții să contribuie activ la analiza datelor, oferind astfel perspective mai diverse și nuanțate asupra experiențelor educaționale.

În cadrul proiectului, velfies au fost esențiale pentru a explora percepția studenților asupra inovației pedagogice, reflectând nu doar conținutul educațional, ci și impactul emoțional al acestor inovații. Analiza compozițională și socială a evidențiat dinamici de grup și interacțiuni, arătând modul în care inovațiile sunt percepute și experimentate la nivel individual și colectiv. Această metodologie performativă ar trebui explorată în continuare pentru a investiga fenomenele sociale complexe, aducând o valoare semnificativă în contextul educațional.

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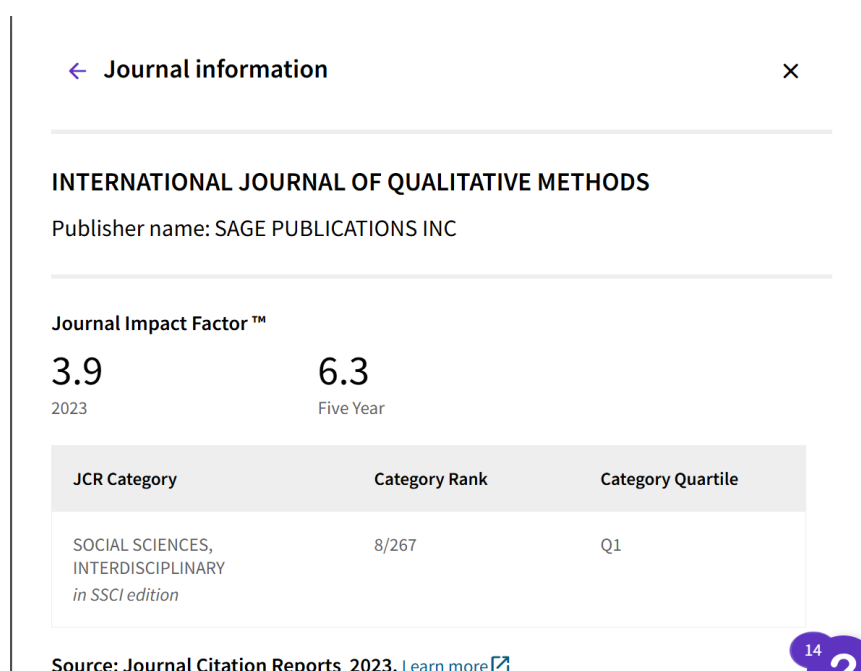
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Manuscris transmis spre evaluare

Manuscrisul rezultat (a se vedea Anexa 1 și Anexa 2) a fost transmis spre evaluare în vederea publicării la *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, jurnal indexat în Web of Science, FI=3,8 (Q1) – a se vedea **Figura 3**.

Figura 3

Informații despre *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*



Sursa: Web of Science

Directorul de proiect este autor corespondent, cu afilierea la AOSR (a se vedea Anexa 1).

Figura 4

Captură de ecran cu mesajul de confirmare a transmiterii spre evaluare a manuscrisului

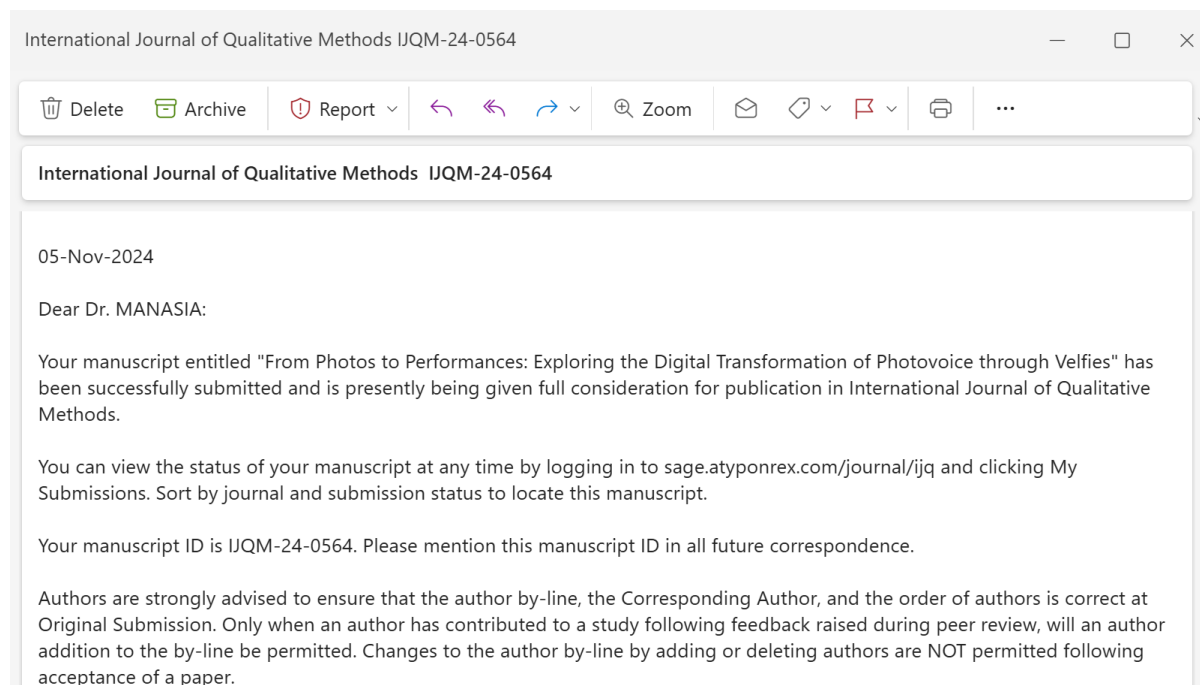
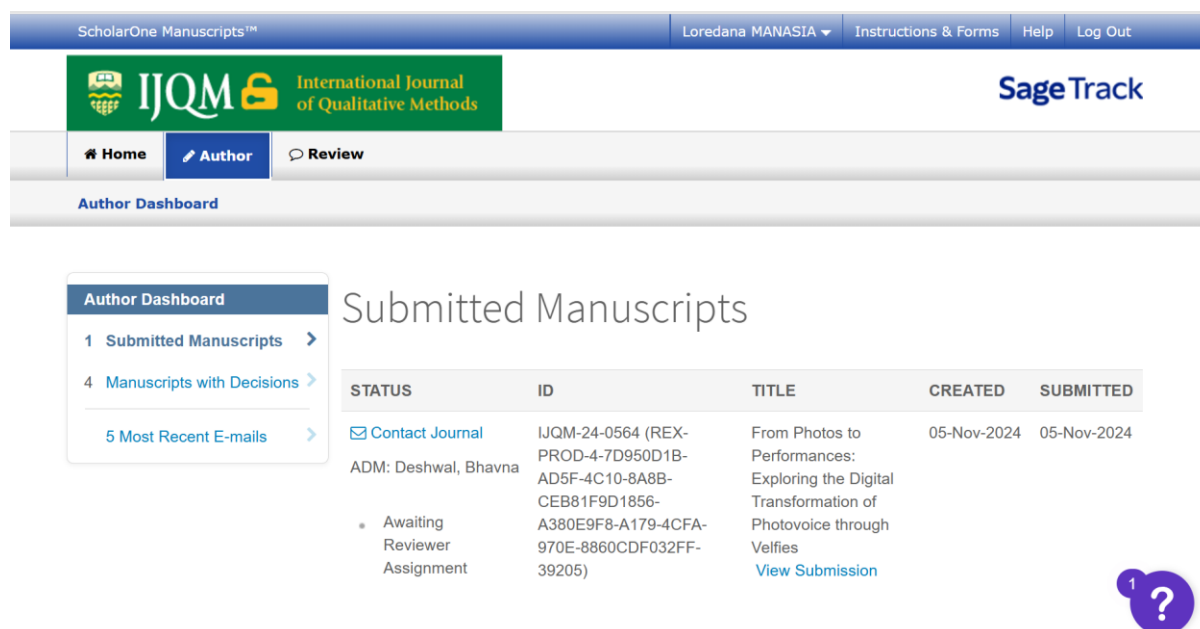


Figura 5. Captură de ecran din platforma ScholarOne Manuscripts prezentând statusul manuscrisului



Activitatea 2.2: Analiza sistematică a literaturii de specialitate

Întrebări de cercetare

Folosind cadrul PICO:

- **Populație:** Tineri cu vârsta cuprinsă între 16-24 ani
- **Intervenție/Expunere:** Inculturația inegalităților socio-economice
- **Comparație:** Elevi cu oportunități reduse vs. elevi cu oportunități egale (dacă este aplicabil)
- **Rezultat:** Efecte asupra învățării, inclusiv patternuri emoționale și de învățare, precum și percepția inegalității.

Întrebarea principală de cercetare:

- RQ: Cum influențează inculturația inegalităților socio-economice rezultatele învățării în rândul tinerilor cu vârste între 16-24 ani?

Întrebări secundare:

- **RQ1.1:** Cum influențează expunerea la inegalități socio-economice patternurile emoționale ale tinerilor, în special emoțiile afiliante și dezafiliante?
- **RQ1.2:** Cum influențează expunerea la inegalități socio-economice procesele și rezultatele învățării, inclusiv performanța academică și reziliența emoțională?
- **RQ1.3:** Cum influențează factorii emoționali precum stima de sine, percepția inegalității, inegalitatea de șanse și sentimentul de echitate implicarea emoțională și rezultatele învățării în rândul tinerilor?

Criterii de includere și excludere

Criterii de includere:

- **Populație:** Studii care se concentrează pe tineri cu vârsta între 16-24 ani.
- **Expunere:** Cercetări privind inculturația inegalităților socio-economice (de ex., diferențe în accesul la resurse, venitul familiei, resursele și bunăstarea comunității sau inegalitatea sistemică).

- **Rezultat:** Studii care analizează efectele asupra patternurilor emoționale, inclusiv emoțiile afiliante și dezafiliant, percepția inegalității, stima de sine, echitatea și starea de pregătire emoțională pentru învățare. De asemenea, studii care explorează dezvoltarea cognitivă, rezultatele învățării, performanța academică sau nivelul de educație atins.
- **Tipuri de studii:** Studii empirice (cantitative sau calitative), meta-analize, studii longitudinale sau recenzii sistematice.
- **Tip de publicație:** Articole din reviste peer-reviewed, publicate între 1990-2024.
- **Limba:** Engleză.
- **Focalizare geografică:** La nivel global.

Criterii de excludere

- Studii care se concentrează pe tineri din afara intervalului de vârstă 16-24 ani.
- Articole care nu abordează relația dintre inegalitățile socio-economice și patternurile emoționale sau de învățare (sau componente ale acestora).
- Lucrări prezentate la conferințe, opinii sau teze nepublicate.
- Studii care analizează factorii socio-economici, dar fără a face legătura cu învățarea, dezvoltarea emoțională sau cognitivă.
- Publicații care nu tratează inculturația inegalității sau nu leagă inegalitățile socio-economice de factori emoționali precum stima de sine sau echitatea.

Dimensiuni ale patternurilor emoționale

Pentru a evalua în mod cuprinzător impactul emoțional al inegalităților socio-economice, au fost explorate următoarele dimensiuni emoționale:

- **Inegalitatea de șanse:** Impactul percepției tinerilor asupra accesului inegal la resurse educaționale sau extracurriculare și efectele acestuia asupra motivației și implicării emoționale în învățare.
- **Echitatea:** Modul în care percepția echității sau inechității în alocarea resurselor sau tratamentului în cadrul mediilor educaționale influențează modelele emoționale, în special în ceea ce privește încrederea în instituții, bunăstarea emoțională și angajamentul față de învățare.

- **Percepția inegalității:** Gradul de conștientizare sau percepție a tinerilor asupra statutului lor socio-economic și ierarhiilor sociale din jur. Aceasta include modul în care tinerii interiorizează sau reacționează la inegalitățile vizibile, afectând implicarea emoțională, sentimentele de excludere sau incluziune și identitatea academică.
- **Stima de sine:** Influența inegalității socio-economice asupra dezvoltării stimei de sine. Inculturația inegalității poate duce la diminuarea sentimentelor de competență, apartenență și reziliență emoțională, esențiale pentru procesul de învățare.
- **Emoții afiliante și dezafiliante:** Emoțiile afiliante, cum ar fi sentimentul de conectare sau sprijin din partea colegilor, profesorilor și comunității educaționale, sunt esențiale pentru rezultate pozitive în învățare. Emoțiile dezafiliante, precum alienarea sau frustrarea cauzată de inegalitate, pot acționa ca factori frenatori în procesul de învățare.

Baze de date

ERIC; PubMed; Scopus; Web of Science

Strategia de selecție a articolelor și sintaxa de căutare

Keywords/Terms: Include emotional outcomes related to inequality, such as self-worth and perception of inequality:

Population: ("Youth" OR "Adolescents" OR "Young adults" OR "Teenagers") AND ("16-24" OR "late adolescence" OR "young people")

Exposure: ("Socioeconomic inequality" OR "Poverty" OR "Wealth disparity" OR "Class inequality" OR "Enculturation of inequality" OR "Social class" OR "Economic marginalization")

Outcome: ("Learning outcomes" OR "Academic performance" OR "Educational attainment" OR "Cognitive development" OR "Achievement gap" OR "Emotional fit for learning" OR "Affiliative emotions" OR "Disaffiliative emotions" OR "Inequality of opportunity" OR "Perception of inequality" OR "Fairness" OR "Self-worth")

Syntax Web of Science & Scopus: ("Youth" OR "Students" OR "Young adults") AND

("Socioeconomic inequality" OR "Poverty" OR "Class inequality" OR "Enculturation of inequality") AND

("Learning outcomes" OR "Emotions" OR "Self-worth" OR "Fairness" OR "Perception of inequality" OR "Inequality of opportunity")

WOS: <https://www.webofscience.com/wos/woscc/summary/f0d395df-c801-43a8-999e-d65a3a25a9e1-0114b6aee2/relevance/1>

ERIC Syntax: abstract:("Youth" OR "Students" OR "Young adults") AND

abstract:("Socioeconomic inequality" OR "Poverty" OR "Class inequality" OR "Enculturation of inequality") AND

abstract:("Learning outcomes" OR "Emotions" OR "Self-worth" OR "Fairness" OR "Perception of inequality" OR "Inequality of opportunity")

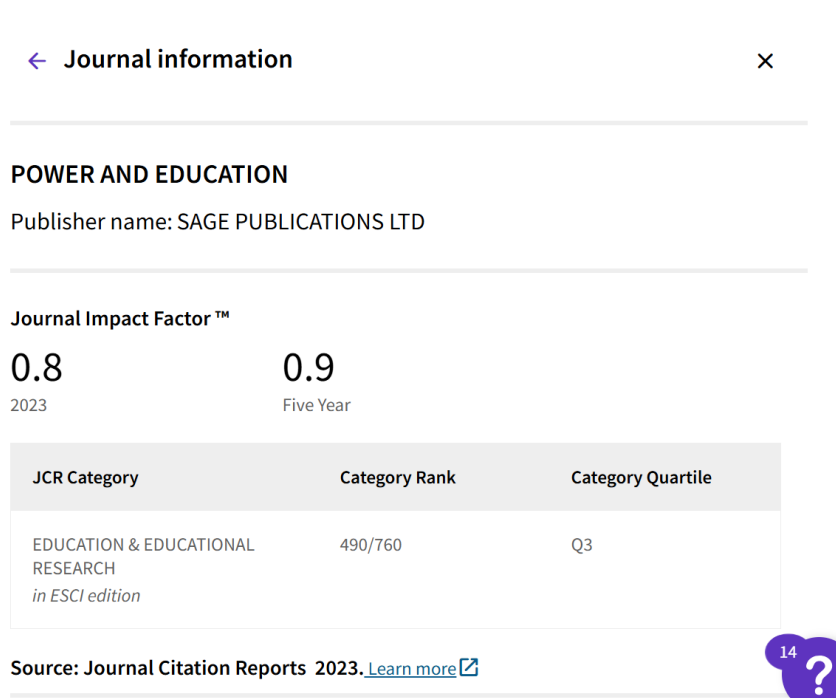
pubyearmin:1900 pubyearmax:2025

Diseminarea rezultatelor analizei sistematice a literaturii de specialitate

Manuscrisul va fi transmis spre evaluare și publicare în jurnalul *Power and Education*, indexat Web of Science, FI=0,8 (Q3)

Figura 6

Informații și metrici privind jurnalul Power and Education



Alte activități de diseminare a rezultatelor cercetării

Participare la ECER 2024

În perioada 27-30 august 2024, s-a desfășurat cea de-a treizecea ediție a Conferinței Europene de Cercetare în Educație (European Conference on Educational Research – ECER 2024), sub patronajul prestigioasei European Educational Research Association (EERA). Evenimentul a avut loc la Universitatea din Cipru, în Nicosia, oferind un cadru academic excelent pentru întâlnirea cercetătorilor din domeniul educației din întreaga Europă și nu numai. Programul conferinței a fost extrem de variat, incluzând o gamă largă de activități menite să stimuleze schimbul de idei și colaborarea interdisciplinară: prelegeri susținute de invitați speciali recunoscuți la nivel internațional, prezentări detaliate ale celor mai recente cercetări și studii, sesiuni de tip panel pentru dezbateri interactive, precum și reuniuni dedicate rețelelor tematice și asociațiilor naționale. Asociația Română de Cercetare în Educație, una dintre cele 42 de organizații membre ale EERA, a avut o prezență semnificativă la această ediție, fiind reprezentată de 21 de participanți proveniți din diverse instituții academice din România. Directorul de proiect este membru al ARCE România și al ECER.

Pe parcursul conferinței, am avut ocazia să particip la multiple sesiuni și workshopuri de interes, precum: "Emotions and Atmospheres in Education" (27 august), "MAXQDA and AI on Education Research" (27 august), "Insights into Learning and Assessment" (27 august), "New Methodologies in Education Research" (28 august), "Inequalities and Schooling" (28 august), și "Open Science and Open Education", printre altele. Aceste sesiuni au oferit oportunități valoroase pentru diseminarea rezultatelor cercetării, aprofundarea cunoștințelor și explorarea unor perspective inovatoare asupra educației contemporane.

Participare la CERED 2024

Rezultatele cercetării pentru cea de-a doua etapă, anume re-desingul photovoice pentru integrarea aspectelor multimodale, au fost prezentate la Conferința Națională de Cercetare în Educație (CERED 2024) (<https://arced.ro/cered/>), care a avut loc la Oradea, 3-5 octombrie 2024. În cadrul evenimentului, am facilitat un workshop pentru tinerii cercetători, al cărui obiectiv a vizat familiarizarea acestora cu designul cercetărilor calitative, utilizând informații și date incluse în manuscrisul *From Photos to Performances: Exploring the Digital Transformation of Photovoice through Velfies*.

Tabel 1 Fotografii realizate în cadrul CERED 2024



Anexe

Anexa 1: Pagina de titlu a manuscrisului

Running head: FROM PHOTOS TO VELFIES

1

From Photos to Performances: Exploring the Digital Transformation of Photovoice through
Velfies

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests: The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability: Data from the "Capturing Innovation in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (CAPTIVATE)" project are openly accessible. They can be found on the Open Science Framework at the following link:
https://osf.io/wju6d/?view_only=3019109f0b7244fc815e1356e4d8becc

Anexa 2: Textul principal al articolului (a nu se publica pe website)



From Photos to Performances: Exploring the Digital Transformation of Photovoice through Velfies

Journal:	<i>International Journal of Qualitative Methods</i>
Manuscript ID	IJQM-24-0564
Manuscript Type:	Research Article
Keywords:	e-photovoice, velfies, echo velfies, performative velfies, photovoice
IJQ Research Topics:	Methods in Qualitative Inquiry, PAR - Participatory Action Research, Photo Narrative, Photovoice
Abstract:	In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional Photovoice studies, this article explores the potential of digital technologies to not only adapt but transform the Photovoice methodology. We introduce e-Photovoice, a digital evolution that enhances participant agency by allowing them to shape the research narrative through performative elements, particularly velfies (self-recorded video performances). This approach shifts participants from being mere observers to active performers, enriching the research process with diverse, multimodal expressions. Our study with university students, focused on interactions with innovative pedagogies, demonstrates how velfies and other digital tools in the e-Photovoice framework can deepen engagement and provide richer, more nuanced data. We argue that this performative, digital approach offers a new methodological direction for capturing the complexities of lived educational experiences.

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Abstract

In response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic on traditional Photovoice studies, this article explores the potential of digital technologies to not only adapt but transform the Photovoice methodology. We introduce e-Photovoice, a digital evolution that enhances participant agency by allowing them to shape the research narrative through performative elements, particularly velfies (self-recorded video performances). This approach shifts participants from being mere observers to active performers, enriching the research process with diverse, multimodal expressions. Our study with university students, focused on interactions with innovative pedagogies, demonstrates how velfies and other digital tools in the e-Photovoice framework can deepen engagement and provide richer, more nuanced data. We argue that this performative, digital approach offers a new methodological direction for capturing the complexities of lived educational experiences.

From Photos to Performances: Exploring the Digital Transformation of Photovoice through Velfies

Introduction

In the digital age, the Photovoice methodology offers a unique way to capture complex personal and social narratives (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Dunn et al., 2024; Harasym et al., 2024; Selke, 2016). Traditional Photovoice has empowered participants to visually document experiences, yet recent critiques highlight gaps in authentic participant agency and expression (Chen, 2023; Ng et al., 2024). This study introduces e-Photovoice, integrating velfies (self-recorded videos) (Knoblauch, 2004; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020) to foster a performative and expressive participant role, thereby addressing these limitations. Through this approach, we explore how digital modalities like velfies allow participants to engage as active storytellers, offering richer, multimodal perspectives on lived educational experiences (Damşa et al., 2024; Parsons et al., 2023; Rennie et al., 2022; Valdez & Gubrium, 2020).

Introduced by Wang and Burris (1997), Photovoice has become a key participatory action research method, empowering participants to document and share personal, social, or professional experiences. Originally applied with marginalized groups (Harley, 2012; Oliffe et al., 2023; Sutton-Brown, 2014), it has since expanded to fields like education, public health, and international development, facilitating rich, multimodal data collection (Breland et al., 2024; Currin-McCulloch et al., 2024; Golden, 2020).

However, recent scholarly discourse has raised critical concerns regarding the authentic participatory nature of Photovoice. Chen (2023) critiques the potential for researcher dominance within Photovoice methodologies, arguing that this dominance could undermine the method's foundational goal of participant empowerment. A scoping study by Ng et al. (2024) echoes these concerns, highlighting inconsistencies in participant engagement and potential misrepresentations of participants' intentions within photographic narratives (Abma et al., 2022; Rania et al., 2021). Additionally, Wang and Hannes (2020) have observed that researchers often prioritize accompanying narratives over the photographs themselves, limiting the ability of the images to convey meaning independently. Börner et al. (2024) note that few studies have considered 'enabling new opportunities for participants to be heard and/or seen' (p. 4).

In response to these critiques, there is a growing call among scholars to rethink and adapt Photovoice to be more responsive, inclusive, and truly participatory (Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020). This paper revisits the broader question posed by Börner et al. (2024): To what extent do current Photovoice practices enable true self-expression for participants? How can we reconceptualize key concerns of Photovoice—such as co-production, ownership, and power dynamics—by integrating multimodal self-expressive practices, such as velfies, into the research process? And ultimately, does this shift towards self-expression represent a departure from Photovoice as traditionally understood? If so, what does this transformation entail?

Moreover, the role of digital technologies in shifting the focus from participation to expression has been largely overlooked in existing scholarly literature (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Harasym et al., 2024). We argue that the digital milieu offers methodological

flexibility that may extend beyond traditional Photovoice frameworks, enabling participants to express themselves through text, images, or videos—velfies included—that not only document social or individual realities but also contribute to co-creating them.

In this paper, we base our arguments on a study involving university students who participated in a Photovoice project during and after the pandemic. This research is part of the Capturing Innovation in Teaching and Learning in Higher Education—the CAPTIVATE Project (Author 1 & Author 2, 2023), which aims to document how students experience pedagogical innovation in their daily learning experiences.

The following sections present the background and conceptualization of Photovoice as a participatory action research method. We then detail the CAPTIVATE project, discussing our positionality and reflexivity as senior researchers involved. The discussion culminates in a reflection on our findings, which have led us to explore velfies as new forms of interactive self-expression within Photovoice studies.

Background

In participatory research, visual methods have become essential, enabling rich, nuanced engagement with participants' experiences and perspectives. Wang and Burris's (1997) introduction of Photovoice marked a pivotal shift, establishing it as a core tool in participatory action research and community development. Photovoice empowers participants to document and reflect on their environments through photography, fostering insight into personal and communal narratives (Bandaiko & Arku, 2023; Harley, 2012; Yang, 2023). It serves three main goals: (1) capturing community strengths and concerns, (2) sparking critical discussions on pressing issues, and (3) informing policymakers to drive social change (Wang & Burris, 1997 apud Yang, 2023).

Initially used with Chinese women to inform policy on health and community concerns (C. Wang, 1999; C. Wang & Burris, 1997; Yang, 2023), Photovoice has since been applied across various fields, including education, public health, and anthropology, illustrating its adaptability (Author 1 & Author 2, 2024; Guell & Ogilvie, 2015; Power et al., 2014; Rania et al., 2021). Researchers have used Photovoice to explore issues like learning (Author 1 & Author 2, 2017; Harrietha et al., 2024; Werremeyer et al., 2016), prostate cancer (Oliffe & Bottorff, 2007), across diverse demographics such as youth (Adams et al., 2017), middle-aged adults (Kingery et al., 2016), older adults (Mysyuk & Huisman, 2020), immigrants (Rodriguez et al., 2016), and Indigenous communities (Jones et al., 2013).

Photovoice's flexibility underscores its role as a potent participatory tool, amplifying often unheard voices and enhancing understanding of complex social and human interaction phenomena. Its process typically involves recruiting participants, introducing the project and ethics, allowing time for photo-taking, and using focus groups or interviews to explore narratives. These discussions, paired with photos, form the basis for analysis, with results often shared with policymakers and the public. Some scholars emphasize participant involvement in postproduction, such as photo editing and selection, to ensure authenticity (Golden, 2020).

The methodological strengths of Photovoice are manifold, as it facilitates access to and engagement with complex environments and experiences, surpassing the limitations of more traditional observational or retrospective research approaches. By empowering participants to actively contribute to the research narrative, Photovoice fosters a deeper, more authentic

engagement with the investigated phenomenon, enriching the research findings (Chen, 2023; Ferlatte et al., 2022; Oliffe et al., 2023; Warfield, 2017).

However, despite its promise as a participatory method, integrating diverse stakeholders into the analytic process in a feasible, collaborative, and rigorous manner remains challenging (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Switzer & Flicker, 2021). Comprehensive reviews have noted that the transition from discussion to analysis, dissemination, and action planning is often less prescribed and remains predominantly researcher-driven (Coemans et al., 2019). Although rich analytic models for Photovoice are beginning to emerge (Capous-Desyllas & Bromfield, 2018; Q. Wang & Hannes, 2020), these models tend to reflect a researcher-driven approach.

Recent scholarly discourse has called for more nuanced approaches that better reflect Photovoice's participatory nature. Wang and Hannes (2020) advocate for a comprehensive analytical framework that moves beyond merely interpreting participant narratives, suggesting that greater consideration should be given to the photos themselves to uncover deeper layers of meaning. Capous-Desyllas and Bromfield (2018) advocate arts informed data analysis in Photovoice studies. Similarly, Switzer and Flicker (2021) propose a multistep model that includes participants in the analysis process, aiming to empower them and ensure their perspectives are authentically represented. These perspectives highlight the need for more participant-centered methodologies to fully capture the complexity and potential of Photovoice.

The advent of digital technologies and the rise of posthumanist thought have further expanded the scope of Photovoice, facilitating the emergence of virtual, online, or digitally enhanced Photovoice, as we refer to as e-Photovoice. This evolution leverages digital and social media platforms and tools to enrich the methodology, extending its reach and deepening its impact (Ferlatte et al., 2022; Oliffe et al., 2023). Our investigation integrates this recent iteration of Photovoice into the exploration of innovative pedagogies within higher education, reflecting on how digital advancements have transformed the application and efficacy of participatory research methods.

The CAPTIVATE Project: An Overview

Our team conducted a series of Photovoice studies on student learning patterns (Author 1 & Author 2, 2017) and pedagogical innovation in higher education (Author 1 & Author 2, 2024), guided by the framework established by Wang and Burris (Wang & Burris, 1997). While our results were relevant and impactful, our reflections prompted us to reconsider critical aspects that could potentially reshape the Photovoice methodology. The arguments in this study are based on the CAPTIVATE project (Author 1 & Author 2, 2023).

Taking a participatory and interpretative approach, the CAPTIVATE study aimed to understand the perceptions and perspectives of Science and Technology (S&T) students regarding learning experiences shaped by innovative pedagogies, with the goal of developing clusters of these pedagogies to inform higher education learning design.

The research was designed at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic to be conducted digitally, involving the production and collection of images and narratives. Recruitment was completed using a purposeful sampling strategy (Emmel, 2013; Patton, 2015) through university social media channels, online flyers, and posters, aiming to engage a diverse group of students and ensure varied perspectives. Researchers followed up with 127 potential participants, sending them project details and a digitally hosted consent form via Survey Alchemer™. Of these, 63 completed the consent process and agreed to participate in initial group meetings. Ultimately, 43 participants (33% of the initial group) actively engaged in the study.

The participants' ages ranged from 19 to 52 years old ($M = 22.6, SD = 2.34$), including non-traditional students, particularly those above 25, to enrich the study's insights. Among the 43 participants, 27 self-identified as female and 16 as male, enrolled in programs such as Engineering and Management, Aerospace, Biomedical Engineering, Applied Sciences, Mechanics and Mechatronics, and Materials Science. Participation was voluntary, with students fully informed about their rights, including the option to withdraw. Incentives, in the form of gift cards, were provided upon project completion.

The project began with online training sessions, introducing participants to the study's objectives, the Photovoice methodology, and ethical considerations. Sessions included guidance on creating photo titles and contextual descriptions (narratives), preparing participants to document their experiences meaningfully. Study prompts were delivered during the first session.

For the development of the narratives, a semi-structured approach was employed. This guided participants to explore what was seen in each picture, connect it to personal experiences, and contemplate the innovative context. Ethical considerations, particularly concerning photography in educational settings, were rigorously discussed, advising participants to obtain consent and avoid direct front-view shots to maintain privacy.

Given the lack of face-to-face interaction, a Teams classroom was created, along with a WhatsApp group, to guide participants in timing their photography. The use of these tools was intended to keep participants engaged, avoid attrition, and ensure quality data collection. After the second group meeting, participants commenced photographing from March 2021 to document and reflect on process innovation. Our study, conducted over three semesters from March 2021 to June 2022 (three academic semesters) and approved by the Ethics Committee (Ref. No. 16027/09/12/2020), coincided with the pandemic's online and hybrid learning phases.

Researchers' reflexivity

In this study, we adopted a reflexive approach, recognizing that the quality of qualitative research hinges on how researchers navigate and interpret data, particularly within challenging contexts (Flick, 2022). Our backgrounds in educational policy, cognitive sciences, and education sciences shaped our initial focus on pedagogical innovation. This positionality made us aware that our perspectives could influence design choices and interpretations, potentially framing the concept of innovation through our lenses. To mitigate this, we intentionally revisited established models of innovation, striving to capture dimensions of innovation perceived as transformative by students.

Guided by a phenomenon-centered approach, we prioritized reciprocity and co-creation, enabling both researchers and participants to shape the data collection and analysis. As teachers, we recognized that participants might struggle to articulate "innovation" in learning. To bridge this gap, we shared images representing pedagogical innovation from our perspectives. These initial images served not as data but as conversation starters, fostering mutual understanding and helping participants find their own narratives.

Traditional reflexive tools proved challenging in a fully digital environment, prompting us to adopt a "3D" (dialogic digital discussions) strategy. Regular online sense-making sessions and written reflections allowed us to track evolving insights and address potential biases. This continuous dialogue enhanced transparency and responsiveness, enabling us to adapt our methods based on participant feedback and emerging perspectives.

The pictures: The inception of the CAPTIVATE project and its results

As previously mentioned, we began designing the project during the height of the lockdown, with our first exploratory meeting held in late March 2020. Building on our prior experience with Photovoice projects (Author 1 & Author 2, 2017), we aimed to create a study that would document learning experiences and the use of innovative pedagogies at an S&T university in Romania. At that time, as the world grappled with the concept of the ‘new normal’ and engaged in debates about the benefits and drawbacks of digital education (Nobre & Mouraz, 2020; Nurhas et al., 2022; Secundo et al., 2021), we harbored some doubts about the project’s success, particularly regarding the learning experiences participants might capture through their photographs. Nonetheless, in Romania, as in many other parts of the world, uncertainty was the prevailing sentiment, shaping not only the future of education (Iivari et al., 2020) but also broader societal expectations (Shek, 2021). Nevertheless, our strong desire to explore the topic (Derrington, 2019), our sense of ‘want-to-do-ability’ (Rossman & Rallis, 2017), and the phenomenon-centric design strengthened our commitment to the CAPTIVATE project, which we envisioned as an e-Photovoice initiative, to be conducted entirely online. Although the term ‘e-Photovoice’ has not yet appeared in the literature, it best captures our approach to the CAPTIVATE project. This decision required us to adapt all project phases—including participant recruitment, training, informative meetings, data collection, participatory analysis, and dissemination—to a digital format. Building on the foundational Photovoice framework by Wang and Burris (1997) and its subsequent adaptations for educational settings by Author 1 and Author 2 (2017), we designed the project to fully leverage digital tools and online platforms.

To effectively design our e-Photovoice project and learn from (potentially) similar approaches, we undertook a review of existing literature on virtual, online, and digitally mediated Photovoice projects. This review highlighted innovative applications across various research domains, demonstrating Photovoice’s flexibility and impact in virtual environments. For instance, Tanhan and Strack (2020) adapted traditional methodologies to online formats to explore the wellbeing of Muslim college students, while Musanti and dos Santos (2020) integrated the method into digital narratives for an online master’s course, emphasizing equity and social justice. Moreover, Creighton et al. (2018) discussed the ethical challenges of displaying participant-produced photographs online, addressing digital content management and participant privacy. Hiscock’s (2020) study used Photovoice to involve students in the design of virtual learning environments, making these platforms more interactive and student-centered. Studies by Aboulkacem et al. (2021), and Rania et al. (2021) provided valuable insights into the potential and challenges of adapting traditional Photovoice methods to digital contexts. Common themes across these studies include the complexities of participant engagement in virtual settings, ethical and practical considerations in online data collection, and the overall integration of digital tools into the research process. These examples provided valuable insights into the potential challenges and strategies for engaging participants in meaningful ways within digital spaces, aligning with our goal of implementing a fully digital Photovoice initiative.

However, we noted was unsuccessful by now to integrate such insights in a consistent framework for conducting e-Photovoice, especially at the onset of the pandemic. This gap posed a challenge as we sought to ensure that our methodology was rigorous and capable of producing high-quality data despite the complexities of a fully digital implementation during such unprecedented times.

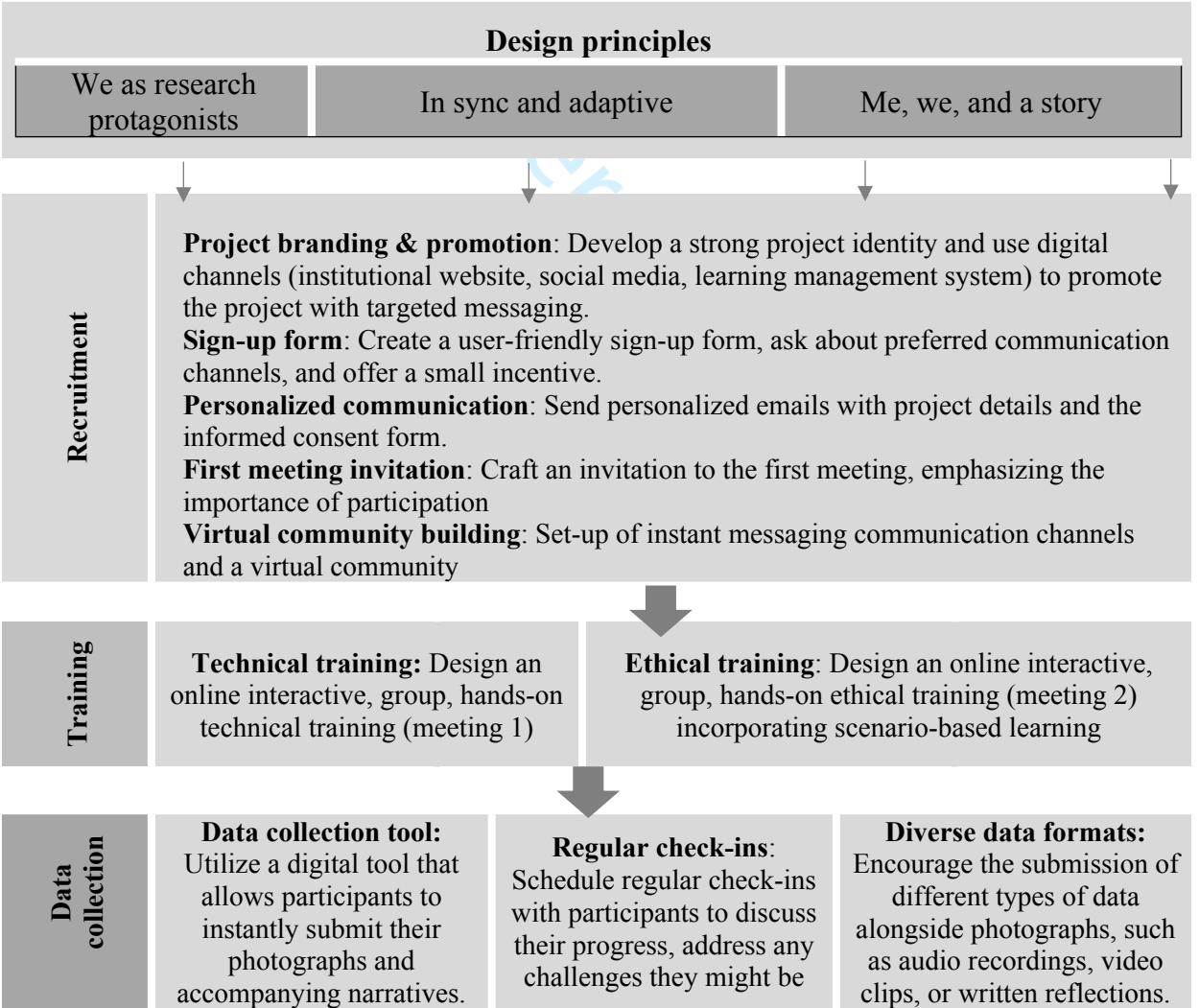
We saw *engagement* as pivotal in refining our design. Inspired by customer experience research (Shi et al., 2020; Verhoef et al., 2015), we adopted an *omnichannel approach*,

integrating digital tools to enhance both participant experience and data collection. Viewing the project through a multidisciplinary lens (Derrington, 2019) and utilizing channels like the institutional website, social media, and messaging apps (see

Figure 1) were key strategies.

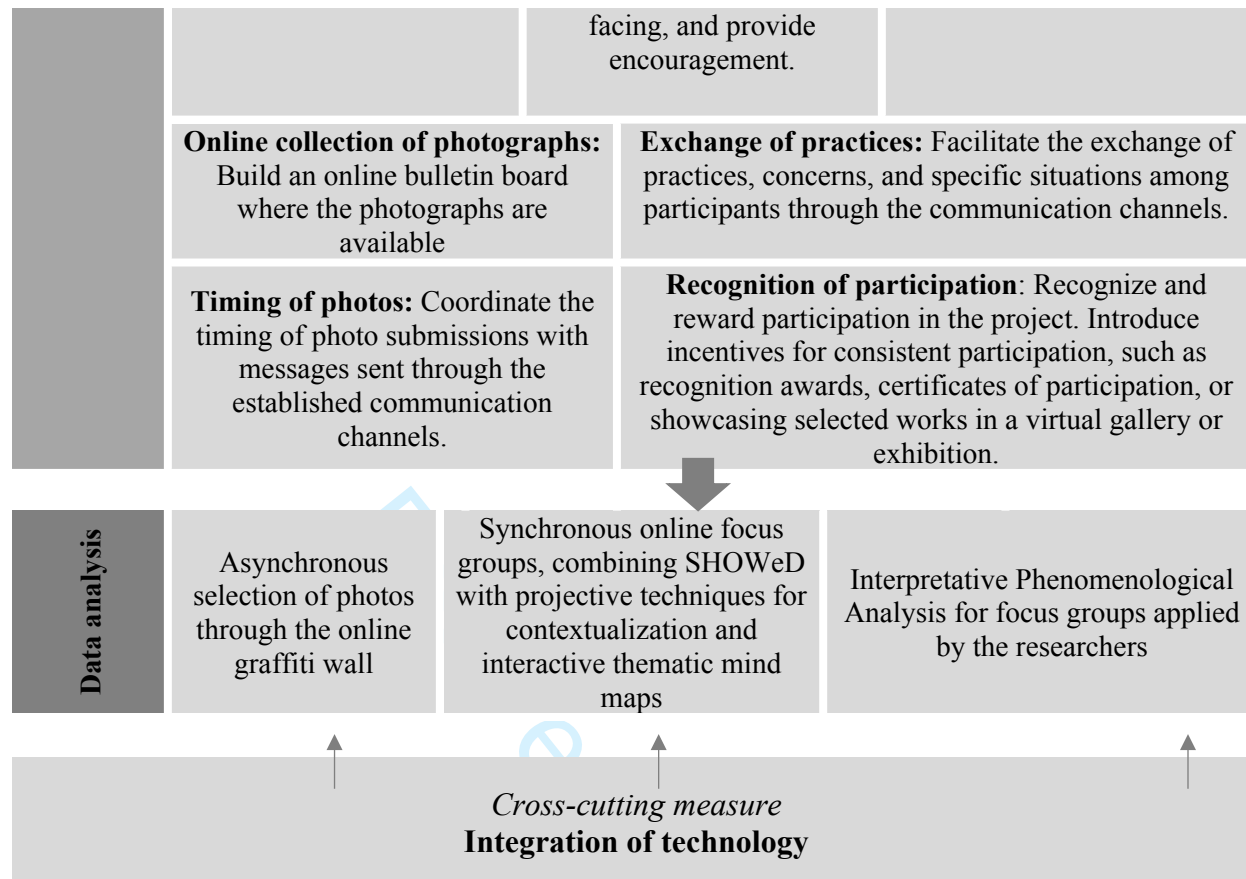
Rooted in the foundational stages of Photovoice (Wang & Burris, 1997) and enriched with a postmodern approach (Creswell, 2013), our framework prioritized inclusivity through three core principles: *We as Research Protagonists*, *In Sync and Adaptive*, and *Me, We, and a Story*. These principles promoted “we-ism” and a commitment to “becoming together” in research (Rubini & Viteritti, 2023), creating a space for expressive engagement—particularly crucial during the pandemic. Our approach emphasized participant agency and flexible, meaningful engagement across digital channels preferred by the participants (*In sync and adaptive*). *Me, We, and a Story* embodied our epistemologies and approach to understanding the phenomenon, emphasizing the collective construction of meaning.

Figure 1.
The CAPTIVATE project e-Photovoice Framework



FROM PHOTOS TO VELFIES

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Recruitment stage. The recruitment phase was essential to the success of the e-Photovoice project, with the omnichannel approach proving instrumental. Beginning in October 2020, we developed a project identity and promoted it through digital channels—such as the institutional website, social media, and learning management systems—using targeted messaging. We streamlined recruitment with a sign-up form that gathered key information, including participants' preferred communication channels. An incentive encouraged sign-ups, after which we maintained personalized email communication to share detailed project information and obtain informed consent. Once consent was received, participants were invited to the first meeting. We also facilitated virtual community building through WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams (see **Figure 2**) to foster early engagement among participants.

Figure 2

The CAPTIVATE's Community in Microsoft Teams

Training stage. In the training stage, we aimed to equip participants with the skills and knowledge needed for the e-Photovoice process, focusing on two main components: technical and ethical training. The *technical training* was conducted as an interactive, hands-on online session, aligning with the guidelines for Photovoice analysis by Wang and Hannes (2020). Participants were introduced to the digital tools and platforms used in the project, with real-time practice and researcher support to enhance engagement and readiness.

The *ethical training*, held separately, was also interactive and used scenario-based learning to help participants understand and navigate potential ethical issues, ensuring they were well-prepared for responsible contributions.

Data collection stage. We utilized a *digital data collection tool* (i.e., Survey Alchemer®) that allowed participants to instantly submit their photographs along with accompanying narratives.

Figure 3
Exchanges in the WhatsApp Group

To maintain participant motivation and address challenges, we scheduled *regular check-ins* for progress discussions, feedback, and encouragement from facilitators and peers. Using the Experience Sampling Methodology (ESM) (Zirkel et al., 2015), we guided participants in timing their photography through a mix of random and event-based sampling (Bolger & Laurenceau, 2013). For random sampling, morning prompts reminded participants to capture daily learning activities, while event-based sampling allowed participants to capture moments of learning that represented process innovation.

Although the primary focus was on photography, some participants expressed interest in recording videos. To enrich the data, we encouraged a variety of content, including audio, video clips, and written reflections, capturing a wider range of experiences. This diversity in content added depth to the data collection, and outcomes will be detailed in the next section.

To foster community, we created an online Graffiti wall in Miro, featuring participant photos and narratives. When submitting photos via Survey Alchemer, participants could choose to share their narratives on the CAPTIVATE wall (**Figure 4**), a communal space for participants to view and reflect on each other's work, strengthening group connection and engagement.

Figure 4
CAPTIVATE Wall in Miro

To further motivate participants, we introduced *recognition and reward mechanisms*, offering certificates of participation and incentives, in the form of gift cards, provided upon project completion.

Data analysis stage. Data analysis combined asynchronous reflection and synchronous discussion to capture diverse perspectives. Participants first selected and reflected on their photos through an online platform, choosing 1 to 3 images with personal or collective significance. Then, in focus groups, we applied the SHOWeD method and interpretative phenomenological analysis to deepen the collaborative interpretation, emphasizing the shared meaning and contextual richness of the data.

Finally, the researchers applied *interpretative phenomenological analysis* to the focus group discussions (Love et al., 2020), ensuring a deep and nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences.

The velfies: From Pictures to Performances

Our e-Photovoice project was guided by the need to foster participant engagement and a genuine willingness to contribute. To achieve this, we focused on establishing positive emotional connections that would facilitate more egalitarian researcher-participant relationships, promoting collaboration throughout the research process (Bindels et al., 2014; Pope, 2020). To support this goal, we designed both synchronous and asynchronous spaces—such as the Teams classroom,

the virtual Graffiti wall in Miro, the WhatsApp group, and the Survey Alchemer link—that enabled participants to share insights and reflect collectively, whether explicitly or implicitly. Informal channels like WhatsApp were particularly crucial, as they not only allowed us to address specific issues ‘just in time’ but also helped build trust and connection among participants and researchers (Fisher & Monahan, 2023; Hoover & Morrow, 2015). We encouraged participants to engage with each other’s questions, share thoughts and experiences, and cultivate a sense of belonging and community, rather than simply taking pictures and participating in focus groups.

Building and deepening trust involved blurring the boundaries between researcher and participant by giving back—not only through sharing technical content but also by fostering researcher reciprocity through the exchange of everyday experiences and realities (Fisher & Monahan, 2023) - see **Figure 5**. The post below is an example of a message sent by one of the researchers in the WhatsApp group saying: *Good morning! I wish you a productive week, and don't forget about sustainability and how you see it in the activities at your faculty and university. I'm a big fan of Twitter, so I'm sharing my picture here as well. Science for a better future!*

Figure 5

WhatsApp Group screenshot with a message shared by the researcher

This exchange of everyday experiences not only deepened trust but also empowered participants to voice their preferences, leading to a pivotal shift in our approach, as they began to explore more expressive forms of documenting their experiences.

During the data collection phase, the project transitioned from a participatory approach to a more expressive one, a shift initiated by participant feedback. Valentina, a 4-year student, highlighting this evolution, noted in her video documenting pedagogical innovation in higher education, "I know you said to take pictures of the learning experiences we liked, but I felt like a video would do more. It's like I am really part of that experience" (Börner et al., 2024).

In response to Valentina's insights, we invited all participants to consider using videos in addition to photographs. This suggestion resonated with many, who found videos more natural and representative of their active involvement in the educational experiences. Consequently, a consensus emerged that short videos offered a more authentic and meaningful representation of the events they were documenting (Derrington, 2019; Rossman & Rallis, 2017; Saldaña, 2015).

Following this shift, we applied the analytical matrices proposed by Wang and Hannes (2020) to examine the videos submitted by participants. Unlike the participatory and interpretative phenomenological analysis used for photos, our video analysis emphasized methodological aspects of participation and expression, focusing less on coding and theming. Notably, this analysis was conducted exclusively by researchers, without participatory involvement from participants. The core dimensions of the videos produced are synthesized in Tables 1 and 3, with examples from the CAPTIVATE study illustrating these points.

Site of production

A key analytical focus was the *site of production*—how videos were produced (Wang & Hannes, 2020). Since the shift to video was driven by participant suggestions, training was limited to a non-interactive video tutorial detailing video production basics (see **Figure 6**). This

tutorial emphasized capturing natural, unscripted moments over staged scenarios, encouraging participants to authentically convey their stories through motion and sound. We chose not to provide synchronous technical training to avoid disrupting the ongoing photographic process, particularly as not all participants transitioned to video production.

Site of production – Technological and compositional modalities. In relation to technical and compositional modalities, the videos displayed two primary characteristics. Participants created either impersonal videos, which documented environments and activities for a broad view of educational settings, or personal videos where they directly interacted with the camera, providing an intimate and expressive view of their learning experiences (Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012). Consequently, these self-made videos, where participants not only filmed but also starred, were termed "velfies". Similar to a selfie—a self-portrait typically snapped with a smartphone—velfies extend this concept into video format, capturing dynamic personal expressions and interactions, which may then be edited and shared (Knoblauch & Schnettler, 2012; Sterling-Fox et al., 2020).

Drawing from performance and documentary theory (Pasqualino, 2007), we identified and named two distinct types of velfies within the compositional modality: "echo velfies" and "performative velfies." Echo velfies capture and convey thoughts and emotions, whether or not the video maker's face is visible, while performative velfies involve participants actively contributing to the subject, thus creating a shared reality rather than merely depicting it.

Site of production – Social modality. In the production of these velfies, the social modality played a particularly significant role. Some velfies were deeply personal, reflecting individual emotions and thoughts, while performative velfies were more focused on vivifying collective educational experiences, fostering a sense of togetherness and belonging within the community.

Table 1
Question matrix for analyzing the site of video production

Sites	Technological modality	Compositional modality	Social modality
Site of production (How is the video taken?) - Preproduction	The CAPTIVATE project initially guided participants in documenting their learning experiences through photography. As the project progressed, however, a shift occurred when some participants began to explore video creation, attracted by its potential for a more dynamic and immersive documentation. In response, we developed a video tutorial detailing the anatomy of video production (see Error! Reference source not found.). Despite this resource, we did not offer synchronous training to further support this transition.	To facilitate the transition from photographs to videos, the researchers structured video creation into four stages: topic selection, scenario development, location selection, and equipment setup. The guidance provided emphasized the importance of capturing natural, unscripted moments rather than staged scenarios, encouraging participants to tell their stories authentically through motion and sound. The instructional video also underscored the significance of narrative structure, illustrating how different compositions can	The research team placed significant emphasis on the ethical and social implications of video creation, particularly regarding participant privacy and consent.

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Sites	Technological modality	Compositional modality	Social modality
		evoke a range of emotions and convey distinct messages.	
Site of production (How is the video taken?) - Production	Participants engaged in both impersonal and personal video production. Impersonal videos typically documented environments and activities without direct involvement, providing a broader perspective on the educational settings. In contrast, personal and performance videos featured participants directly addressing the camera, creating a more intimate and expressive portrayal of their experiences. The technological setup varied, with some participants using handheld devices for a raw, authentic feel, while others employed more stable setups for polished, performance-based videos.	The composition of the videos varied widely. Some participants chose to create staged, performative pieces where they explained or demonstrated their experiences with innovative pedagogy, while others captured spontaneous moments of their educational journey. The videos ranged from first-person perspectives that immersed the viewer in the participant's experience to more observational shots that provided a detached overview of the learning environment.	Some videos were deeply personal, reflecting individual experiences, while others took a broader view, focusing on collective educational experiences.

Note: Adapted from Wang and Hannes (2020)

Figure 6

Screenshots from a tutorial video

Site of the video

The site of the video, as analyzed in Table 2, refers to the content of the video (Wang & Hannes, 2020), reflected in the three modalities: technological, compositional, and social modalities. Using the guiding questions from the analytical matrices designed by Wang and Hannes (2020), we examined the three modalities in the velfies.

Site of video – Technological modality. On a technical level, we observed that the echo velfies were not modified (see Figure 7 and Figure 8). The videos were predominantly recorded using smartphones, with no noticeable elements removed or alterations made to size, color, or intensity. The blur seen in the illustrative screenshots was added by the researchers to anonymize the videos.

Table 2

Question matrix for analyzing the site of the video

Technological modality	Compositional modality	Social modality
Echo velfies were typically recorded on smartphones with minimal editing, preserving their raw, unaltered nature.	Echo velfies emphasize personal reflection with minimal staging, focusing on authentic, direct expressions.	Echo velfies focus on individual introspection and personal expression within a social context.

The only post-production modification was the addition of blur effects for anonymity. In contrast, performative velfies often involved more active editing, such as adding text labels, cutting scenes for better flow, and sharing on social media platforms. These edits reflect participants' intent to shape the narrative and enhance the video's impact.	Performative velfies involve more deliberate compositional choices, such as framing, added text, and interaction with the camera, to shape and enhance the narrative, reflecting collective storytelling and the participant's active role in constructing meaning.	Performative velfies emphasize collaboration and community, highlighting collective storytelling and shared learning experiences that foster a sense of belonging and solidarity.
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Note: Adapted from Wang and Hannes (2020)

Figure 7
Screenshot from an echo velfie where the participant reflects on working in teams and building emotional connections with her teammates

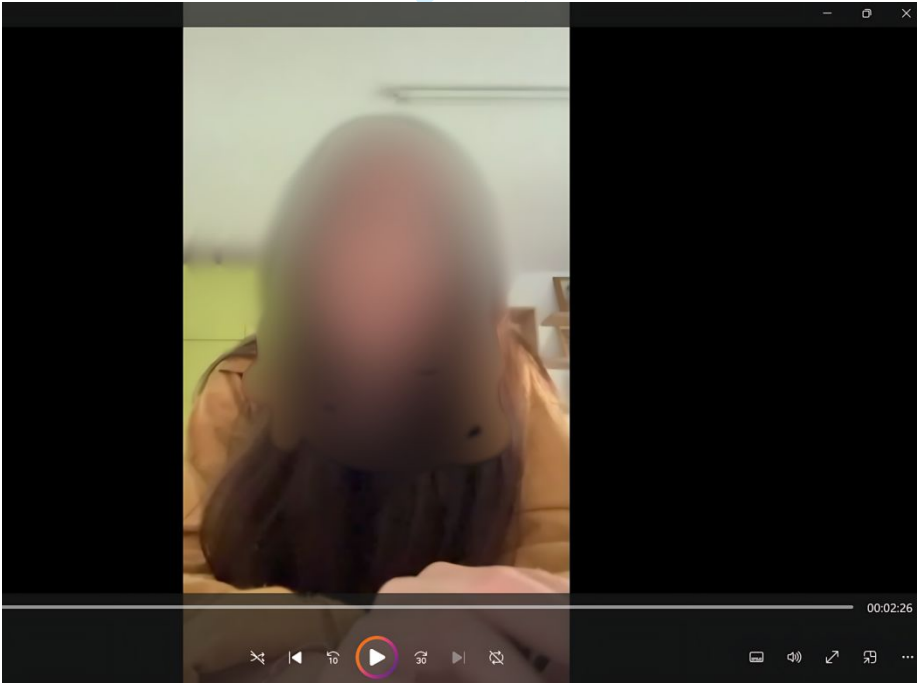


Figure 8
Screenshot from an echo velfie where participants share their reflections on the importance of emotional education in higher education settings

In the performative velfies, participants often engaged in more extensive editing, such as adding text labels to frames, cutting scenes to enhance the video's flow, or sharing the final product on social media platforms. For example, as shown in Figure 9, one participant added a frame with the text, "There is a second chance for education." These modifications reflect the participants' intention to shape the narrative and enhance the impact of their messages.

Site of video – Compositional modality. The compositional modality in both echo and performative velfies centers on how participants choose to present their experiences and convey meaning through visual and auditory elements. In echo velfies, the focus is often on the personal reflections and emotional expressions of the individual, typically presented through direct address or simple, unembellished footage. These velfies rely heavily on the authenticity of the narrative, with little emphasis on staging or visual effects.

In contrast, performative velfies often include more deliberate compositional choices. Participants may use staging, framing, or added text to enhance the narrative, and they might actively engage with the camera to construct a more polished or impactful message (Figure 10). The use of space, interaction with the camera, and the inclusion of visual elements like text or background details contribute to a collective storytelling approach that underscores the participant's role in shaping the reality they are presenting.

This compositional approach reflects the participants' intent and the broader social and educational contexts within which these velfies were created, highlighting the importance of how visual and auditory elements are orchestrated to convey meaning.

Figure 9

Screenshot from a performative velfie that was technically modified

Figure 10

Screenshot from a performative velfie

Site of video – Social modality. In echo velfies, the social modality is characterized by individual introspection, where participants share personal thoughts and emotions, often highlighting their sense of identity and personal experiences. Performative velfies, however, emphasize community and collective identity, focusing on shared experiences, educational themes, and fostering a sense of belonging. The awareness that these videos would be viewed by others, including researchers and peers, influences how participants present themselves and their narratives, blending personal expression with broader social and cultural contexts. As an example, the velfie in Figure 11 illustrates the social modality through the participant's collaboration with others to document a learning experience related to a social research project. The inclusion of additional characters and the juxtaposition of classroom and outdoor scenes emphasize teamwork and the connection between education and community, reflecting the participant's engagement in a collective social context.

Figure 11

Screenshot from a performative velfie documenting a social research project

Similarly, in the performative velfie depicted in Figure 12, the social modality is further highlighted through a moment of "togetherness," where learning transforms from a structured academic task into a collaborative venture with a collective purpose. Both examples underscore the power of collective engagement in educational settings, shifting the focus from individual achievement to shared experiences and collective growth.

Figure 12
Screenshot from a performative velfie highlighting community and solidarity in a collaborative learning environment

Discussion and conclusion

This article builds on insights from the CAPTIVATE study to advocate for e-Photovoice as a significant ‘move toward digital research methods’ (Börner et al., 2024), enhancing participant engagement through more expressive mediums like velfies. We have explored and reflected on the development and implementation of an e-Photovoice study, where every stage was conducted remotely and digitally. Additionally, this article highlights and exemplifies the use of velfies not only as a mode of participant expression but as ‘an act of research itself’ (Pasqualino, 2007).

The purpose of this article is to share practices and reflections on using e-Photovoice and velfies, offering insights that may benefit other researchers. Media and communication scholars, as well as art historians, have recognized video and other mobile media as central to contemporary social life and creative production, fostering cultures of DIY, recycling, interactivity, networking, and conviviality (Jurriëns, 2016). While some scholars have explored velfies as learning strategies (Sterling-Fox et al., 2020), fewer studies have considered velfies as research tools. For example, Gopal et al. (2023) used self-recorded videos as a novel tool for remotely assessing dexterity in patients with multiple sclerosis.

Given the arguably limited research on virtual, online, or digitally mediated Photovoice (Ferlatte et al., 2022; Oliffe et al., 2023; Ottoni et al., 2023; Rania et al., 2021)—what we term e-Photovoice—there may be a temptation to view it as a *compensatory methodology* (Börner et al., 2024) rather than an *expressive* one due to the lack of established standards and frameworks (Aboulkacem et al., 2021). However, we argue that focusing on diverse modalities of expression can lead to research that is more contextually aware and better suited for participation. While some forms of expression may seem conventional—such as taking pictures and sharing them in a digital gallery (e.g., the Graffiti wall in our case)—velfies have demonstrated their potential to rethink concepts of co-production, ownership, and power, emphasizing expressive rather than purely participatory research practices.

These reflections have prompted us to consider several questions throughout the project and our evolving engagement with university students. For instance, to what extent do current Photovoice practices enable true self-expression for participants? How can we reconceptualize key concerns of Photovoice—such as co-production, ownership, and power dynamics—by integrating multimodal self-expressive practices, such as velfies, into the research process? And ultimately, does this shift towards self-expression represent a departure from Photovoice as traditionally understood? If so, what does this transformation entail?

First, our e-Photovoice study focused on enhancing participation for both researchers and participants, fostering engagement through a digitally enhanced, omnichannel approach. As Börner et al. (2024) note, creating a digitally enriched research environment is an evolving process, not a one-time decision. Our design, grounded in a phenomenon-centric approach (Flick, 2022) and a postmodern interpretative framework (Creswell, 2013), prioritized participant co-creation and varied forms of expression. By encouraging reciprocity, we allowed participants

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to freely choose their modes of expression, fostering ownership evident in their shift to using velfies and sharing personal narratives. Participants felt comfortable expressing reflections and concerns beyond their images, as illustrated by ML, a second-year student:

“[...] It feels good to share with someone the fact that I really feel exhausted. It's not like I am doing something exceptional, but it's hard. I focus on projects, homework, classes and nothing else. I hope my future life will be nothing like this” (ML, student).

Although this quote doesn't directly address pedagogical innovation, it validates our e-Photovoice framework by amplifying participants' voices. Through digital tools like WhatsApp and Teams within the CAPTIVATE project, we created a "togetherness" environment (Revsbæk & Beavan, 2024; Rubini & Viteritti, 2023) that facilitated dialogue and knowledge sharing. We sustained engagement by responding to emails and messages promptly and posting facilitation messages (e.g., welcome messages, engagement prompts) to maintain a strong presence. This form of presence, though unconventional in photovoice research, raises an important question: how effective are these methods in promoting participation and co-creation? While some participants preferred a lower profile, others actively used the digital tools to share experiences, stories, and lighter, humorous messages. This aligns with the findings of Ottoni et al. (2023) and (Black & Faustin, 2022) who concluded that digitally mediated environments can boost participant-researcher engagement and *build rapport*.

Second, in this research, we explored the potential of “velfies” to reframe Photovoice as a more expressive and co-creative methodology. While video use in research is established, our choice of “velfies” introduced an element that prompted new lines of inquiry and productive problematization. Velfies offered a way to capture lived experiences and, significantly, to co-create shared realities. This decision foregrounded an essential reflection on power dynamics within participatory research. Ng et al. (2024) emphasize the importance of enabling participants to retain control over their images and narratives, a point we considered closely throughout.

In several sense-making sessions, we reflected on the complex interplay of power and privacy. Forge et al. (2018) approached this by guiding participants to securely upload images, while Christensen et al. (2019) highlighted the need for shared ownership of data. Following these insights, we structured a layered approach: first, a private upload space for photos, videos, and narratives; second, a closed Miro board shared among participants; and finally, with consent, the option of an open repository. This layered structure allowed us to engage with participants on levels of openness, emphasizing participant agency in the research process. This also raises discussions on participant disclosure and the need for open data.

Nevertheless, by analyzing the velfies, we learned the lesson that research methods are inherently situated and performative (Law, 2010), demanding deep immersion in the research process. We saw participants that searched for togetherness to convey their stories, while others co-created posed situations to portray pedagogical innovation. The level of immersion that both echo and performative velfies require could be though a barrier for some of the participants, as Borner et al. (2024) found.

In our final reflections, we questioned whether the integration of self-expression through velfies marks a departure from traditional Photovoice and explored its broader implications. The e-Photovoice framework provided a flexible foundation, accommodating both structured guidance and emerging participant-driven expressions. While the research phenomenon and prompts remained unchanged, velfies introduced a new dimension, enabling us to examine

pedagogical innovation through participants' own narratives, offering unique insights into their perspectives. This shift, moving from impersonal visuals—such as screen captures or static room images—to the more personal lens of velfies, invites deeper reflection. Why did participants prefer velfies over standard photographs? Perhaps they saw velfies as identity statements, embedding personal stories within the research process and empowering themselves in ways static images could not (Itzik & Walsh, 2023). Through phones and social media, participants exercised control over their self-expression, building rapport, assuming responsibility, and establishing legitimacy in their own digital spaces (Börner et al., 2024; Casais, 2023). Moreover, the reduced human connection in the post-pandemic era may have intensified the "togetherness" depicted in velfies, as participants echoed shared experiences and crafted collective identities. Velfies enabled participants to create their own norms within virtual spaces, fostering a collaborative, culturally aware, and trust-based environment.

Summing up these reflections, it becomes evident that velfies present a promising avenue for deepening self-expression and expanding Photovoice methodology. Velfies offer a two-fold opportunity within the research community, particularly in project-specific contexts. First, they naturalize within research procedures a familiar behavior among young people—the use of short videos to capture immersion in their surroundings—thus aligning data collection with participants' daily habits. Second, velfies support a dynamic co-production process, enabling genuine expressivity that flourishes in safe, culturally sensitive, and trust-filled environments (Berger, 2015). This alignment promotes authentic participation, empowering participants to express themselves fully and with confidence.

The future of velfies in Photovoice holds potential beyond self-expression. It invites researchers to continually question and evolve the frameworks that guide participant engagement, making room for both structured and emergent forms of expression. As digital research continues to evolve, so too will the ways in which participants choose to represent themselves, potentially paving the way for transformations in digitally enhanced participatory research—one that values personal narrative, authenticity, and collaborative ownership of the research journey.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Data availability

Data from the "Capturing Innovation in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education (CAPTIVATE)" project are openly accessible. They can be found on the Open Science Framework at the following link:
https://osf.io/wju6d/?view_only=3019109f0b7244fc815e1356e4d8becc

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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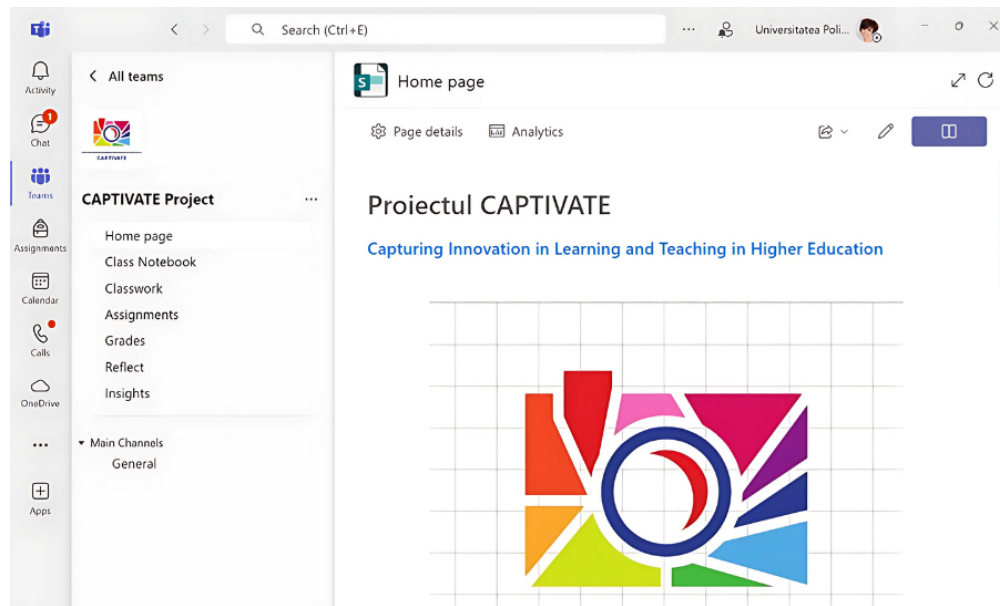
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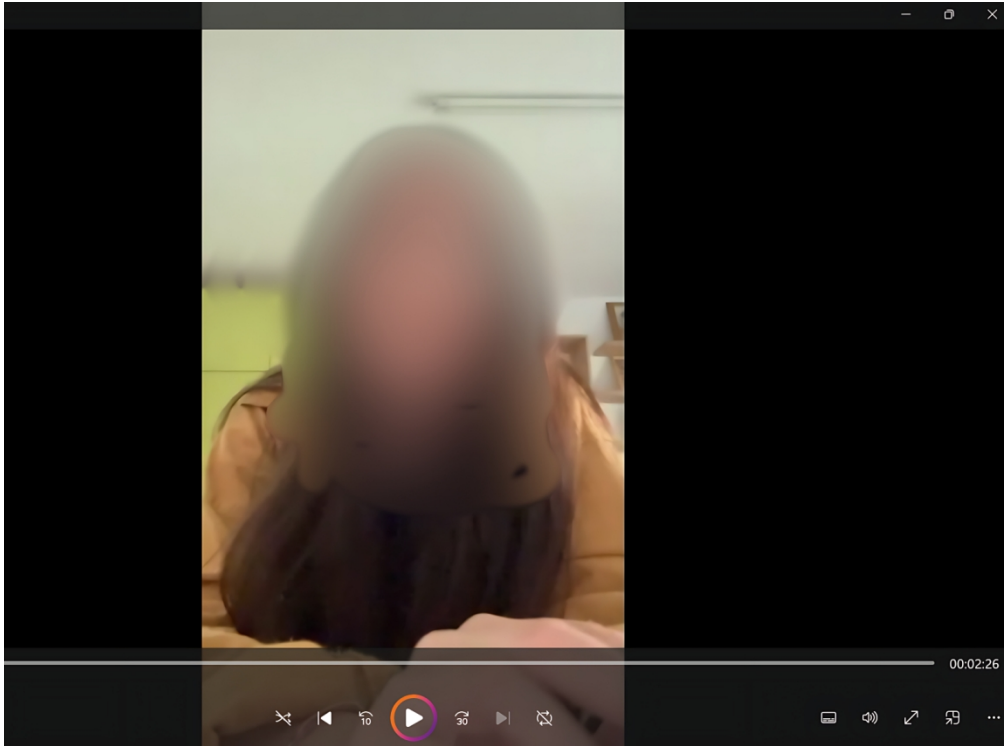
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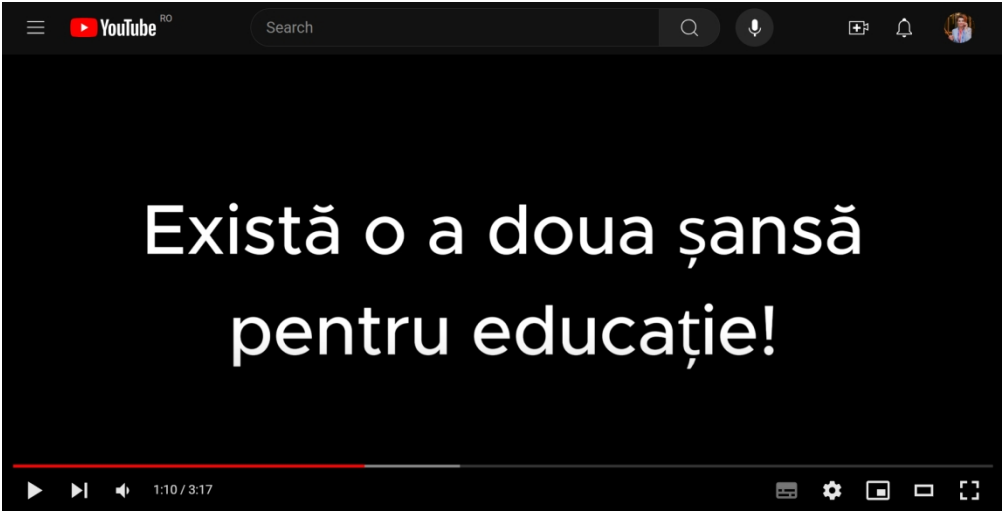


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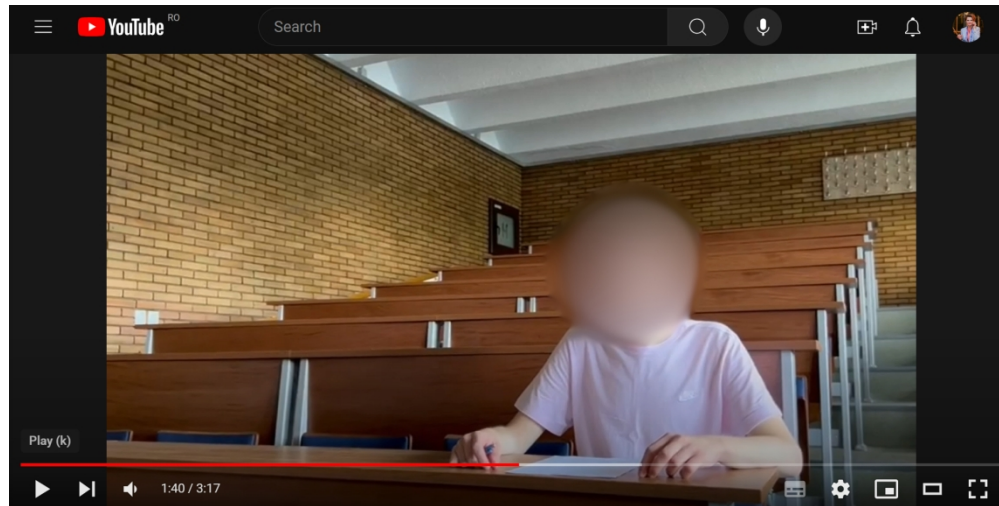


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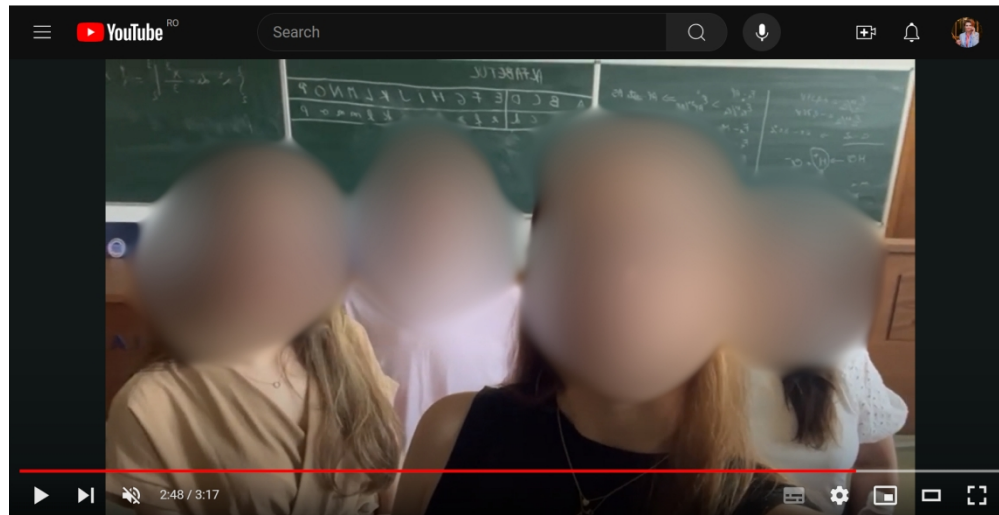
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